

**Mullica Watershed Planning Project
Recreation Technical Focus Group Meeting - May 29, 2002
Summary of Discussion**

TFG Members Attending (* indicates Steering Committee member)

Charles Barscz (CB), National Park Service
Steven Evert (SE), Stockton College - Nacote Creek Field Station
*Bob Hagaman (BH), Pinelands Municipal Council, Mullica Twp.
*Ed Kertz (EK), NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
Jay Mann (JM), Recreational Fishing Alliance
Kathleen Minniewar (KM), NJDEP - Green Acres Program, SCORP
Steve Souza (SS), Princeton Hydro, LLC
Harry Tillett (HT), Atlantic County Div. of Parks & Recreation
Bill Vibbert (BV), NJDEP - Div. of Parks & Forestry. Island Beach & Double Trouble State Parks
Kevin Wickham (KW), Advanced Family Recreation

Pinelands Commission Staff Attending

Larry Liggett [LLL] (moderator)
John Stokes [JCS]
Chris Krupka [CK]
Rich Federman [RF]

[indicates comments made by staff]

(indicates comments made by members of the public)

RECREATIONAL USE: Hiking/Biking

KM: Green Acres program leaves decisions on recreational needs up to municipalities... SCORP is currently collecting that info from municipalities... hard to say right now how much need there is for increased recreational access

CB: Mullica Forum has surveyed 300 people in the watershed so far about their needs & interests... Initial results indicate the following percentages of respondents engage in the following recreational activities:

Fishing	35%	Photography	14%
Canoeing/Kayaking	33%	Birding	11%
Boating	30%	Off-Road (4x4)	9%
Nature Observation	27%	Hunting	9%
Hiking	21%	Horseback Riding	<1%
Swimming	21%	No recreational use	25%
Bicycling	17%		

The final report will be completed by the end of summer 2002.

HT: In Atlantic County over the last 23 years there has been an increase in hiking & biking, especially over the last decade (request for bike trail)

[JCS] [Are there user conflicts between biking & hiking?]

HT: Bikers & hikers are kept separate using signage and education ("education is key")... There are always maintenance and enforcement issues-they try to "create a presence" so that people

feel safe... Atlantic County bike trail is 9 miles from Pleasantville to Mays Landing, a “safe place”... county has some horse use, recently purchased 310 acres as a potential horse area... goal is 10,000 acres or more of parkland

BV: Hiking & biking vs. other uses is a controversial issue in NJ... multiple use trails not best... more people are enjoying passive recreation, which can result in user conflicts... “separation of uses is the way to go”... horses have created a major issue at the bridges in Double Trouble SP... need to develop a trails management plan, otherwise competition between users... without enforcement, off-trail use occurs

(Fred Akers, Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association)
(In the Great Egg watershed, river access (hiking etc. along the river) is an issue)

BV: Very little money is available for maintenance or construction

JM: Are there aerial photos of the watershed?

[LLL] [DEP did overflights and has satellite data]

JM: Creating separate user trails dissects the watershed-we have “overtrailed” in the Mullica watershed already

[LLL] [A trails plan would direct uses appropriately and show who’s going where]

RECREATIONAL USE: Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs) [not SUVs]

(Harry Monesson, Pemberton Twp.)
(The state shouldn’t get involved with ORV issues and their associated hazards and pollution.)

KW: There is only one legal place in NJ to use ORVs: the ORV Park in Chatsworth

[JCS] [Clarification: if a vehicle is licensed, it is allowed on all public roads, lands, etc.]

KW: ORVs include all-terrain vehicles, dirtbikes, etc. but not SUVs... there need to be more places for ORV riders so they have more legal options... it’s one of the fastest-growing sports in NJ

BV: A coalition task force of groups has come out with a draft policy to find common ground... park managers are opposed to having “designated areas” for ORV use... the mission of state parks is conservation of natural areas, not ORV use-they are not compatible... other low-value resource areas (e.g., gravel pits) might be more appropriate, but there is also a concern about liability exposure

(Leslie Ficaggia, Pinelands Commissioner)
(The problem with gravel pits is that they may become habitat for T&E species)

BV: If you open an area to one use, you are closing it to other, incompatible uses

[LLL] [If we open new ORV parks, do users just get bored with them and go elsewhere (i.e., illegal areas)?]

KW: Need to get the message out through enforcement of current laws, fines, etc.

(Fred Akers)

(Illegal use is “rampant” and law enforcement costs are very high... we need demographic info: how many people participate in ORV use, how should we allocate the funds, and who pays for enforcement?)

[LLL] [ORV use has grown nationally]

KW: Working with a task force to get vehicles registered with the DMV and put part of those fees toward enforcement and designated ORV parks

JM: Conflict within ORV user group-some don't follow the rules

KW: When more access is available, more people use legal areas... can't enforce strict laws if there are no other options

HT: Egg Harbor Twp. Has a 5-acre ORV area-doesn't help the situation with illegal use in parks

KW: 5 acres is too small... need facilities on a “family basis”

BH: Mullica Twp. is largely forested and experiences fires... ORV users have decimated roads so that fire truck access is limited... ORV users have infringed on property owners' rights... need to educate, starting with kids and parents buying the equipment... should get into the schools

(Harry Monesson)

(In Jackson Twp., law enforcement can't handle the illegal ORV use...ORV groups should use their own money for access)

(Fred Akers)

(California has legal trails with no connection to law enforcement (their trails plan didn't address the enforcement issue)... NJ needs a policy for allocating 30% of federal (T21) funds to motorized trails in target areas)

RECREATIONAL USE: Powered Watercraft (PWCs)

BV: Implemented a conservation zone last year (2001) at Island Beach State Park where PWCs were banned... PWCs not compatible with other uses there... PWC operators “got it”-allowed to continue with their sport but also protect habitat... other approaches were science-oriented, looked for environmental impacts-industry responded by designing cleaner, quieter but faster PWCs... PWCs have access to areas where traditional boats don't go

SE: In past 5-6 years of sampling in lower Bay and up near Sweetwater, have seen an increase in PWC use... in some narrow areas, see PWCs at high speeds (Mullica, Bass River, Wading River)... need water quality monitoring at marinas

SS: PWC issue is important to the North American Lake Mgmt. Society (NALMS)-they are developing a policy statement... user groups see it as a recreational activity, but it creates conflicts... In Lake Hopatcong, conflicts between boats and PWCs can create dangerous

conditions... important to consider environmental impacts, user impacts, user conflicts

BH: PWCs are negatively impacting stream vegetation, wildlife and fish... PWCs are using very small streams... they're out early this year and need to be controlled

BV: There are three solutions to PWC problems: 1) slow speed/no wake zones; 2) ban them in certain areas; 3) create buffer zones (NJ legislates 100', Island Beach SP uses 300' buffers)

SS: Hopatcong created a designated PWC area... other option is to post BIG signs and have maps that towns can distribute, showing areas where PWC use is allowed... education is key... need to create a safe environment for PWC use because "it's not going to go away"

BV: A county in WA state instituted policy that PWC use is not compatible with their quality of life

CB: Rutgers held a PWC conference last year and concluded that "no-wake zones" don't work

HT: How extensive is PWC use in the Mullica tributaries? How can we enforce bans on PWC use in certain areas?

BV: The Powered Watercraft Industry Association (PWIA) developed a model bill... NJ state bill would allow each town to set its own regulations (PWIA opposed this)

KW: NJ Marine Police are responsible for PWC enforcement

JM: Bill Vibbert's conservation zone plan has been very important, with far-reaching influence

BV: PWCs have an impact on nesting waterfowl in the small tributaries

SE: Suggest that Mullica Forum survey should be expanded-could lead to steps to exclude or expand areas of PWC use

BV: Would like Rutgers to do a study and ask users what they want

(Leslie Ficaggia)

(Accountability is key for enforcement of ORVs, PWCs, etc.)

(Nelson Euler, ASPIRE)

(This is an issue of personal responsibility... need to educate users, starting in schools)

(Mary Lou Fonte, Planning & Zoning Director, Waterford Twp.)

(Mullica Forum can obtain help with the public survey from local environmental commissions)

CB: Mullica Forum is considering direct-mailing survey to reach smaller municipalities

RECREATIONAL USE: Hunting

EK: ORVs and PWCs are doing damage, but NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs have taken no "general" position on their use... fishing and hunting is declining slightly overall, but the group is not looking for any changes... increased access can lead to greater pollution

JM: Kayak fishing has increased... have experienced some conflicts with access in the lower Mullica (power boats)... no kayak access problem, kayaks have minimum ecological or sensory impact. Batsto may be overused, should stay out of sensitive areas

EK: Let's avoid an access problem in the Mullica before it happens

BV: Experienced a problem in Cedar Creek (Double Trouble SP): 2 canoe liveries, increased litter, user conflicts, management problems... developed a stream management program with the liveries: no alcohol (actually increased business), required all canoes to have litter bag (decreased litter), made liveries responsible for weekly cleanups

CB: Private land is the biggest problem in the Great Egg Harbor Watershed - who has jurisdiction? Alcohol is a big problem.

(Fred Akers)

(Great Egg Harbor River has a plan based on the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP)... Should there be changes to the CMP to better spell out use intensity details? ... The key is zoning... Innertubes may bring new trash and alcohol issues-be wary of new uses... Study showed no need for increased access in the Great Egg Harbor River)

(Leslie Ficaggia)

(Sustainability of the resource and loss of ecosystems is important to consider-could this be part of the CMP review?)

(Public comment)

(Need public access to the river in Mullica Twp.)

RECREATIONAL USE: Camping

KM: The draft SCORP should be released in September 2002

BV: The quality of camping facilities in the Pinelands has deteriorated because of limitations on construction in the Pinelands and a wish to avoid competition with private campgrounds... Number of campgrounds is adequate... Always need more cabins-lots of demand!

HT: Limited facilities in Atlantic County... Supply still greater than demand

RECREATIONAL USE: Swimming

BV: Demand is high at locations like Atsion and Bass River)... No plans to increase the number of lifeguards

HT: No swimming access at Lake Lenape... Limited access in Atlantic County for swimming and streamside fishing

RECREATIONAL USE: Municipal / County Recreation

HT: In Atlantic County there has been an increase in soccer fields... Demand is very high... Will the Watershed Management / Recreation Plan have the flexibility to change as public tastes do?

[LLL] [Ongoing process]

RECREATIONAL USE: Golf Courses

SS: DEP has recognized that the demand for golf courses cannot be satisfied, is slowing course development... There are good and bad courses... Natural resources and features and should be highlighted... Many courses have become good at reclaiming and reusing water, and implementing more ecologically-friendly techniques.

[Golf courses are limited by the Pinelands CMP]

JM: Golf courses should not be in the watershed at all... They take up maximum public area for minimum public use... They are totally unnatural... Municipal courses are often poorly managed because of an increase in users... Is the public really in favor of golf courses?... Political/power issue

Public Comment

- Frog Rock Golf Course has preserved native wildlife
- Audubon Society has a golf course program to enhance wildlife habitat
- Pinelands Commission needs to focus more on water issues
- Visitor experience is key-behavior of users
- What is the Pinelands Interpretive Plan and how does it affect these issues?
- Is there a canoe management plan? Should there be?
- More residents of the area should be involved
- There is considerable bank erosion on the Bass River and Mullica River, particularly in the narrower sections. This is caused by the huge sports fishermen power boats from the boatyards on the two rivers when they test their engines at flat out speeds, leaving big waves in their wake. I suggest they be asked to reserve those tests for the open waters of Great Bay.

TFG Member Top Issues

- Balance recreation and watershed protection
- Sustainability of natural resources (water quality, water supply, ecological health)
- ORVs
- Liveries & other commercial use-impairment
- Education on Pinelands resources
- PWC issues
- Get in touch with what people in the watershed want (some restrictions)
- Need for assessment of users and recreation-specific water quality issues
- Private vs. public, resident users vs. visitors from out side of the Mullica watershed
- Enforcement, user conflicts
- Action Now - Education
- ORV/PWC registration
- Public input / public access
- Motorized vehicles (including SUVs)
- Self-regulation / stewardship

ACTION ITEMS / NEXT STEPS

1. Pinelands Commission staff will work with appropriate TFG members and other experts to

obtain requested data/information:

✍ General Recreation:

- Aerial photos of the watershed (from DEP overflights)
- Options for incorporating study of sustainability of watershed recreational resources into the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan review
- Pinelands Interpretive Plan and how it affects recreational issues

✍ Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs):

- Options for developing new, “family-friendly” ORV facilities
- Options for promoting use of newer technology, quieter vehicles
- Options for allocating recreation funds for ORV use
 - ✍ e.g., allocating 30% of federal (T21) funds to motorized trails in target areas

✍ Marinas and Powered Watercraft (PWCs):

- How can restrictions on PWC use in certain areas be implemented and enforced?
- “Conservation zone” plan from Island Beach State Park (BV)

✍ Canoes:

- Cedar Creek (Double Trouble State Park) stream management plan (prohibits alcohol, requires canoe litter bags, makes liveries responsible for weekly cleanups)
- Is there an existing canoe management plan? What are options for developing one?

The information obtained will be used to develop additional Action Now projects as appropriate.

2. Potential Action Now Projects:

- ? **Expand Mullica Forum public survey on recreational use in the watershed, including ORV use, PWC use, public opinion about golf course impacts on water quality and ecological health; may be able to obtain help from env. commissions**
 - ? **Survey of water quality monitoring at marinas in the watershed; link to BMP development/ implementation**
 - ? **Fund efforts to enforce ORV use in the watershed**
3. Commission staff will share data/information and recommendations with TFG members, the Steering Committee and the public and solicit input.
 4. Commission staff will work with watershed partners to implement recommendations.
 5. Next TFG meeting will be organized to review progress and solicit additional expert input.